

Care and conflicts among colleagues

Deacons' professional knowledge development in the Church of Norway



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Introduction

The aim of this article is to explore the knowledge creation¹ of deacons as they interact with other members of their working community in the Church of Norway (CofN) as well as the expression of care among these colleagues. The CofN belongs to the Evangelical Lutheran branch of Christian church and was a state church until 2012. About 75 per cent of Norway's population are baptised members (Church of Norway, 2015b). The average church attendance is approximately 3 per cent of the population per service (Church of Norway, 2015a).

Why is this research focus of interest? To my knowledge, there is no empirical research on deacons' professional knowledge development in congregations or on how the expression of care among members of professional religious working communities influences their knowledge creation processes. Moreover, I regard deacons to be of special interest because of their interdisciplinary role within the church where they negotiate their theology from a wide range of professional knowledge.² Furthermore, extant

research on how care facilitates knowledge development has not addressed workplaces that strive to be external care providers (von Krogh et al., 2001a, p. 49), therefore, such a focus may offer important new contributions. However, the reference is 14 years old, which raises the question of whether the research gap still remains an unexplored field. Searches in research databases show that this research field still remains unexplored (see 'research overview').

One of the workplaces appropriate for research on knowledge creation and care, I argue, is the Church's diaconal work, understood as the 'Church's caring ministry' (National Council, 2009, p. 5). Deacons are leaders of the congregation's caring ministry (Diakonforbundet, 2003). All the congregations of this study had working communities that included various professions: two or three pastors, one cantor, at least one religious educator and one deacon. In addition, there were administrative and technical staff and volunteers.

My analysis draws on Nonaka's concept of *knowledge creation* and Krogh's notion of *care*

related to Nonaka's theories of knowledge creation (von Krogh et al., 2001a). The knowledge creation concept concentrates on *processes* (not knowledge per se), practices and social structures that encourage the formation of new knowledge and innovation, rather than assimilation of existing knowledge (Hakkarainen et al., 2004, p. 12). The concept has been developed to underline *collaborative creativity* in theories of learning (Paavola et al., 2012, p. 1). For knowledge to be developed, it must be shared, re-created and amplified through interaction with others, and the effectiveness of these processes depends on the extent of care experienced in these interactions (von Krogh et al., 2001a, p. 30). In this article I ask:

What characterises the deacons' professional knowledge creation and the expression of care within the working community of the Church of Norway?

To answer the research question, I first present theoretical perspectives on knowledge development and care. Then, I introduce my methodological approach, thematic analysis and finally, the concluding remarks. This article focuses mainly on the processes of knowledge creation and not specifically on the outcomes. The empirical findings indicate processes with low extent of care, but they also expand the theoretical notion of low care by introducing power relations as a suitable concept to characterise some of the empirical findings. Therefore, I argue that knowledge creation theories could benefit from including theories of power in relationships to a greater extent.³ I understand power relationships as the possibility to exercise influence, both negative and positive, in relationships. The central question is how power is exercised, and the focus is on processes, not only structure (Flyvbjerg, 2010, pp. 131–132).

Research overview

Little empirical research has been conducted on deacons in countries that have a diaconal tradition comparable to that of the CofN. Although research on deacons' professional knowledge creation is lacking, some existing empirical studies are relevant to this article. Researchers

in Sweden have investigated deacons' identities and how they experience their work (Lindgren, 2007; Olofsgård, 2003). Another relevant study is Angell and Kristoffersen's examination of deacons' identities and the notion of diakonia in the CofN (Angell, 2011; Angell et al., 2004). These researchers have empirically analysed deacons in parish contexts, but none have directly approached knowledge creation by deacons in everyday practise.

A keyword search for 'knowledge creation' in Google Scholar shows that the work of Nonaka et al. is the most relevant, based on the number of hits (Nonaka & Teece, 2001; Nonaka et al., 2000; Nonaka et al., 2009). Further, searches on 'knowledge creation and care', 'knowledge creation and care and relig*', 'knowledge creation and care and Christian', 'knowledge creation and care and congregation'⁴ showed no relevant hits. Thus, searches in Origo.no and Google Scholar confirm von Krogh et al.'s (von Krogh et al., 2001a, p. 49) call to address the research gap in knowledge creation and care within working communities that provide external care. Moreover, research has established the importance of care in knowledge creation in professional communities, particularly business management (Costa et al., 2010; Styhre et al., 2002; von Krogh, 1998; von Krogh et al., 2000; 2001a, p. 30; von Krogh et al., 2012).

Research on deacons in the CofN fills three knowledge gaps. First, it contributes to research on the professional knowledge creation of the deacons themselves; second, it remedies the lack of broad empirical research on knowledge development in communities of religious professionals; and third, it links knowledge creation and care to communities that are supposed to be external, high-care providers.

Theory of knowledge creation – the SECI process, 'ba' and care

Nonaka's theory of knowledge creation and Krogh's concept of care related to Nonaka's theory offer a theoretical framework for understanding deacons' knowledge creation and expression of care in their professional communities (Nonaka, Konno, et al., 2001; von Krogh et al., 2001b, p. 18). The creation of knowledge

includes both facilitating relationships and dialogues and developing a shared platform of knowledge for the entire organisation (von Krogh et al., 2001b, p. 18). Nonaka et al. (2001) state that an organisation is essentially a knowledge creation entity. Organisations identify and define problems and develop new knowledge to solve these problems through interactions with the environment and within the organisations themselves (Nonaka, Konno, et al., 2001, p. 13). I do not use the concept of organisation in this study but instead, refer to congregations as workplaces and potential knowledge creation entities.⁵ Although I do not discuss whether a congregation⁶ is an organisation, I use the framework of knowledge creation developed by Nonaka et al. (Nonaka, Konno, et al., 2001) because it 1) provides a theoretical approach to analysing knowledge creation in the workplace, 2) can combine the emphasis on knowledge development and care and is not explicitly focused on other business interests, and 3) can be placed within the socio-cultural theoretical framework while emphasising interactions with the environment and among people.

The process of knowledge creation is itself divided into four modes: Socialisation, Externalisation, Combination and Internalisation (SECI). This division provides a structure for understanding the dynamic nature of knowledge creation. According to Nonaka et al. (2001), knowledge is context-specific, dynamic and relational and is established through dynamic social interactions (2001, p. 14).

SECI: The process of knowledge creation

The first mode in the SECI process is socialisation, which emphasises the importance of joint activities and the capture of knowledge through physical proximity, which facilitate shared experiences and the creation of context-specific knowledge. Certain types of knowledge can only be created and communicated by sharing time and space (Nonaka, Konno,

et al., 2001, p. 23). What is learned through interactions in the socialisation process may provide questions, thoughts, ideas and reflections. This mode is also described as *empathising* with the field (Nonaka, Konno, et al., 2001, p. 18). The second mode, the *externalisation* process, emphasises dialogues and reflections with other members of the staff. The goal is that knowledge can be shared by others in the staff community, even though the thoughts, ideas, questions, reflections and experiences may be inadequate and inconsistent (Nonaka, Konno, et al., 2001, p. 16). This mode is characterised by *conceptualising*, or creating *shared* concepts (Nonaka, Konno, et al., 2001, p. 18). The third mode, *combination*, is the convergence of knowledge from the socialisation and externalisation modes to create more complex and systematic explicit knowledge. Combination can take place, for instance, through the production of documents, meetings and conversations via telephone and the internet (Nonaka, Konno, et al., 2001, p. 16). The combination mode defines the concept of connecting, or the transfer of knowledge to others in the congregations (Nonaka, Konno, et al., 2001, p. 18).

Combination is the integration of new know-

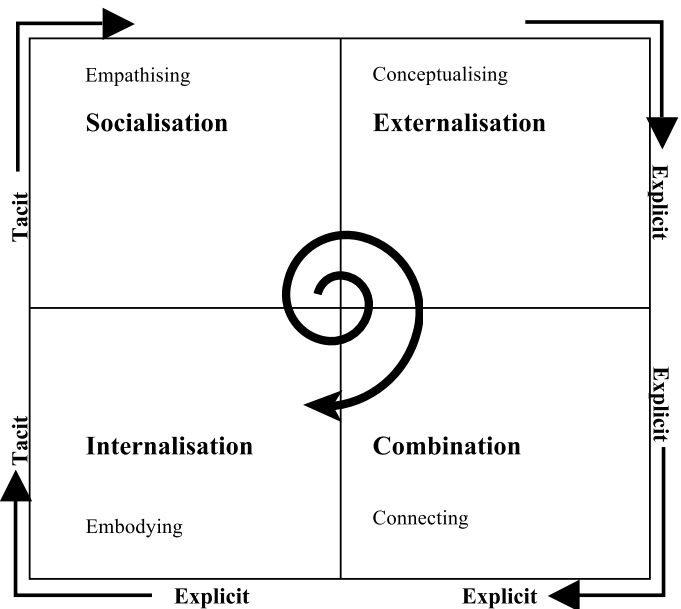


Figure 1: The SECI process (source: (Nonaka, Konno, et al., 2001, p. 18)).

ledge into existing organisational knowledge (Lewis, 2010, p. 43). Finally, *internalisation* is characterised by learning by doing, and it involves the process of *embodying* new knowledge and sharing it within the organisation. The knowledge created in each mode interacts with the others in a continuously escalating process of knowledge creation (Nonaka, Konno, et al., 2001, p. 17). Figure 1 shows the original SECI model, which is also called the SECI process (Nonaka, Konno, et al., 2001, p. 18).

The SECI process was originally developed to describe the conversion of tacit and explicit knowledge across the four modes. However, I do not use these concepts as each mode tends to combine both tacit and explicit knowledge (Nygaard et al., 2013).⁷ For instance, in the socialisation process, tacit knowledge, as a hunch, and explicit epistemic knowledge, as theology, can provide new questions, thoughts, ideas and reflections. Therefore, instead of referring to explicit and tacit knowledge, I refer to situations in which professionals seek new solutions, insights or knowledge. Figure 2 illustrates the modified SECI process developed in

this research, where the deacons move (arrows) between the four modes when seeking new solutions.

The SECI process, illustrated in figure 2, takes place on a platform on which knowledge can be shared, recreated and amplified through interactions with others (Nonaka, Konno, et al., 2001, p. 27). I use the four modes in the SECI process as analytical concepts.

The platform of knowledge creation: ba

Effective knowledge creation requires the concentration of knowledge in a particular time and space. This space is theorised as *ba*, a platform where knowledge is created, shared and exploited. *Ba* is not necessarily a physical space, but it is a context that harbours meaning. *Ba* can be physical, such as an office, virtual, such as email, mental, such as shared experiences, values and ideas, or a combination of all three. The most important aspects of *ba* are the interaction between individuals and between an individual and the environment in the process of creating knowledge. Thus, *ba* is the common time and space created through emerging relationships among the individuals and groups creating knowledge (Nonaka, Konno, et al., 2001, p. 19). The concept of *ba* is used to analyse shared platforms of interactions between the deacons and their colleagues.

Bringing care into knowledge creation

One definition cannot cover all dimensions of care. In this article, I use von Krogh's notion of care because 1) his notion of care is combined with Nonaka's theories on knowledge creation (von Krogh et al., 2001a), and 2) he has outlined five dimensions of care that provide a useful analytical operationalisation.

von Krogh argues that the presence or absence of care

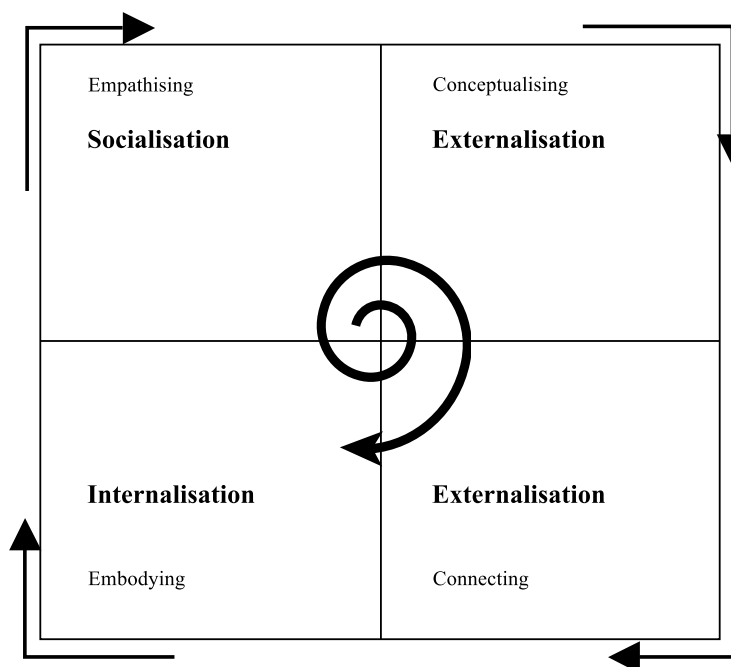


Figure 2: A simplified model of the SECI process adjusted to my use of the model.

affects the development of organisational knowledge (von Krogh et al., 2001a, p. 30). Therefore, human relationships in a working community should be given adequate attention. According to von Krogh et al. (von Krogh et al., 2001b, pp. 67-73), care has five dimensions: reciprocal trust, active empathy, good access to help and advice, minimal condemnation and a 'can-do' spirit. High-level care relationships in an organisation include all five dimensions. Low-level care relationships are those in which there is little propensity to help, colleagues are not accessible to one another, there is little empathy, there is widespread condemnation and everybody puts himself or herself first. High care in knowledge creation promotes deeper relationships in which one shares personal difficulties and ideas more often and becomes a resource in the knowledge creation process. In contrast, in low-care relationships, only certain, established knowledge is discussed explicitly while doubts are kept hidden (von Krogh et al., 2001b, p. 73). However, care has some overall limitations. First, care is based on an often implicit understanding of a need for help. Second, care can be misused as a strategy of manipulation (von Krogh et al., 2001a, p. 48). In this analysis, I use von Krogh's five dimensions of care to investigate how care empirically emerges when colleagues interact.

By deacons' *professional* knowledge creation and care in this article, I refer to 1) deacons as professionals because of their specialised and scientific knowledge obtained at university or university college (Smeby, 2012, p. 49), and 2) as a delimitation of deacons' knowledge creation and care to work situations.

To operationalise the analytical concepts of the SECI process, *ba* and care, the research question is divided into two main analytical steps. The first step focuses on the empirical characteristics of the SECI processes:

What characterises the SECI processes in the deacons' working communities?

In this analysis, two new main empirical patterns of the SECI process emerge, both of which are different from the theoretical ideal SECI process. I call the two new empirical patterns a 'pre-defined' and a 'parallel' or isolated SECI

process. The first analytical question continues with one sub-question:

What characterises the pre-defined and the parallel SECI processes?

In the second step, I am attempting to understand these patterns in the context of how care is enacted in interactions between colleagues, I subsequently ask:

What characterises the knowledge creation processes and the expression of care in the pre-defined and parallel SECI processes?

In both the first and second steps of the analysis, the concept of *ba* is included.

Methods

The present study is part of a larger research project on learning and knowledge processes in the CofN, 'LEarning and knowledge TRAjectories in the Church of Norway', called LETRA.⁸ The sample for the study included relatively large congregations in the CofN. As mentioned, all of the congregations contained working communities from a variety of professions. The five congregations had extensive programmes of activities for church members. I do not regard the geographic variations as crucial in this study, due to the similar representation of professionals and activities in all congregations.

The sampling criteria selected deacons in the CofN with a formal diaconal education. Deacons ordained before 2005 needed a single year of theological studies and one year of diaconal studies in addition to the bachelor's degree, but not a master's degree, as required by those ordained after 2005. The deacons I studied had either of these two educational requirements, and they had backgrounds in nursing, social work, child welfare or theological education.⁹

A variety of ethnographic methods were chosen to capture the complexity of the deacons' knowledge creation. The empirical material analysed in this article was established through *ethnographic fieldwork*, consisting of *observations*, *informal interviews* (Hammersley et al., 2007, p. 117) and three semi-structured qualitative interviews with each of the five deacons during their everyday practice in the CofN from Fall

2011 to Fall 2012 (Kvale et al., 2009, pp. 21,47). Ethnography is a method of the *direct observation* of social practices and actors in their natural settings to access what people actually do (Silverman, 2011a, p. 15ff). I chose to be a participant observer with an emphasis on observation, because I wanted to disturb the deacons' normal work interactions as little as possible (Bryman, 2012, pp. 440-445). I observed and took notes using my laptop and notebook, and I used the Dictaphone as often as possible, but I did not partake in discussions or work tasks. The Church staff gave informed consent in advance.

I observed each deacon for a period of one to three weeks during daily activities, from early morning to the end of their working day in a variety of contexts: 1) in interactions with colleagues at staff meetings, during small talk, at other meetings and at Church services; 2) in interactions with participants¹⁰ in diaconal activities, such as pastoral care and Bible groups; 3) in interactions with professionals outside the local Church, at seminars, study trips abroad and collaborative groups of deacons. In the process of following the deacons, I established a series of 'representations of the field' as field notes, photographs, recordings, memories and informal interviews (Denzin et al., 2005, p. 3).

The informal interviews were characterised by questions that emerged as relevant in the situation (Hammersley et al., 2007, p. 117). Further, the three semi-structured qualitative interviews with each deacon established their narrative accounts (Silverman, 2011b, p. 131). I applied a thematic analysis (Bryman, 2012) with an abductive approach (Afdal, 2010, p. 114) to establish a dynamic interaction between the material and the theoretical focus of my analysis. The material was coded in Atlas.ti (Friese, 2012), employing concepts from my understanding of both the empirical material and theories. The coding process uncovered the two new empirical types of the SECI process identified above. The analysis was then narrowed down to a selection of samples from the two SECI processes to maximise the utility of information from small samples (Flyvbjerg, 2010, p. 79). I looked for deeply involved situations and situations rich in details (Flyvbjerg, 2010,

p. 135) that illustrated both SECI processes and the extent of care. Two situations with maximum variation were selected to provide insight into the spectrum of care and knowledge creation (Flyvbjerg, 2010, p. 79). The first situation illustrates the SECI process with the lowest level of care: Deacon William suggested serving hot dogs at a meeting of elderly parishioners that traditionally served sandwiches. The other situation illustrates a higher level of care and knowledge creation: Deacon Katie invited a woman begging in the streets into the Church. Both situations indicate challenges in the deacons' knowledge development process in their work environments. The deacons have read and approved their quotes, and the material has been made anonymous (Miles et al., 1994).

Analysis

What characterises the five deacons' knowledge creation and expression of care in their work community? The analysis is structured according to the two mentioned analytical steps.

What characterises the SECI processes in the deacons' working communities?

In the first analytical step, two empirical patterns of the SECI process emerged. The first was a process that pointed to *pre-defined* guidelines and routines in the working communities. This process functioned effectively in the everyday implementation of routines. However, how did the established processes perform when everyday situations became too complex for the pre-defined guidelines? The second was the *parallel we* SECI process that indicated that members of the working community were primarily occupied with their own tasks. In this context, how and with whom did the deacons seek to collaborate when faced with situations that exceeded their own knowledge of how to act? In the following, I explore these two patterns in depth.

What characterises the pre-defined SECI process?

During my observation period and the interviews, all five deacons whom I observed expressed that they were exhausted by their experi-

ences with the pre-defined guidelines within the working community.

I observed Deacon David at a staff meeting, which is usually the only meeting where all members of a work community participate during the week. Here, the members share experiences from the past week and discuss tasks for the next. David suggested having a diaconal service, emphasising environmental diaconia with focus on ‘caring for creation’ (National Council, 2009, p. 5), but none of the other members at the staff meeting responded directly, and the pastor said he had to think about it. Afterwards, in our informal interview, David explained this limited interest by the scarce meeting time available. On one hand, routines at staff meetings may facilitate effective interactions that maintain everyday practice; efficiency may be experienced as necessary to complete all the work tasks. On the other hand, routines may facilitate platforms of minimal care and mutual sensitivity (von Krogh et al., 2001b). In particular, externalisation—the dialogue-based mode of sharing new and unsecure thoughts and ideas—is challenged by routines and time constraints.

Deacon Katie told me about a staff meeting where she shared the idea of an ‘open local church’ (‘åpen kirke’). Katie argued that opening the church could enable a freer community and a valuable space for people. According to Katie, her idea was met with concerns, such as: ‘What if the silver gets stolen, or if hooligans show up?’ ‘What about the insurance?’ ‘What about fire?’ Katie says that it is hard to do anything because ‘We have so many rules and guidelines. The rules just push down, and hinder new ideas.’

I did not observe this

staff meeting, and many of the arguments against Katie’s proposal, such as guidelines, insurance concerns and fire prevention, could be valid. Furthermore, staff meetings may not be the appropriate arena for new ideas. Katie’s interpretation of the guidelines could also be highly subjective. Rather than ‘rules that push down’, others might experience them as necessary guidelines to maintain existing activities. Moreover, the responses could be representative for only the individuals expressing them and not for the whole working community. Still, Katie’s story highlights pros and cons for guidelines. The pre-defined SECI process is not necessarily negative, as working communities may need routines to efficiently fulfil tasks. The challenge appears when new ideas are presented.

The ba, where colleagues can talk with one another to turn new ideas and experiences into new concepts, models and plans, could be hindered by routines and time constraints (Nonaka, Konno, et al., 2001, pp. 16,21). The lack of multi-faceted dialogues in the externalisation mode suppresses new ideas and restricts the changing of habits in documents, meetings and conversa-

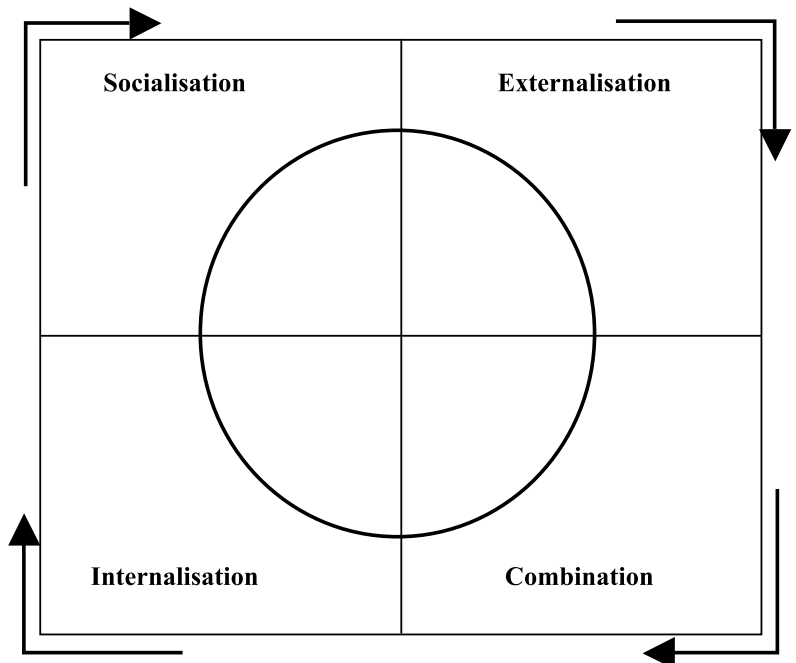


Figure 3: The pre-defined SECI process, where established habits resist the adaptation of new elements.

tions in the combination mode (Nonaka, Konno, et al., 2001, p. 16). Consequently, the work community may resist internalisation or the process of embodying new knowledge to test ideas, like an open church. Based on these empirical findings, I propose an alternative SECI process: the pre-defined SECI process, as illustrated Figure 3.¹¹

Pre-defined guidelines are not only related to activities. Deacon David discusses the pre-defined yet unclear conception of the deacons' roles in their work community:

The pastors here haven't been the ones helping me the most to make clear my role as a deacon... they have held firmly on to an old, traditional way of thinking about diakonia... I have struggled to open up to the fact that diakonia is something else than it was thirty years ago... that role of comforting and taking care of the elderly (informal interview).

What David calls an 'old, traditional way of thinking' about a deacon's role can be understood as a pre-defined approach. According to David, the resistance to breaking established routines has affected collegial interactions (Nonaka, Konno, et al., 2001). He continues, disheartened:

One of the frustrations during my twelve years as a deacon ... has been the way I've had to work to become visible. Pastors, church wardens and organists all have defined tasks. But the deacon, what is that? ... Do I always need to tell you that what I do is as important as what you do (informal interview)?

According to David, the combination of a pre-fixed understanding and an invisible and undefined role for the deacon in the staff community hinders the creation of a *ba*. The lack of a shared *ba*, where his role is understood and acknowledged, challenges the SECI process in all modes. Deacon Emma expresses the same challenges:

I feel that I have to have a strong case if I am to match the other professions in the staff... and it's like – what can you bring to the table? Where are your skills relevant? I have to express many things myself, make a stand... even if I work in the Church and the Church knows what a deacon works with, I need to express why I do what I do (semi-structured interview).

All five deacons expressed fatigue regarding the deacons' role, the pre-defined guidelines and lack of acknowledgement. Deacon William explains:

I am struck by the fact that I am not heard more. My tasks and ways of addressing them are pre-defined, and no one asks if it works today... I have to put aside my own professionalism and experience, and try to understand what they want (informal interview).

Finally, Deacon Sophie says, 'You have to work hard to be heard', and she concludes on the same note as the other four deacons: 'The pastors' understanding of diakonia is significant for the deacons' role in the Church community' (informal interview).

In sum, empirical findings show that the deacons' knowledge creation processes with colleagues, the SECI, can be characterised as pre-defined processes. Routines are both necessary and challenging.

What characterises the parallel SECI process?

All five deacons describe a sense of loneliness and a lack of common vision within the work community. This isolation affects knowledge creation because the community does not enter the SECI process as a group. In this section, I analyse how deacons work on their own tasks. First, I observed that deacons mainly work on their individual tasks. Being preoccupied with one's own tasks can facilitate effectiveness and allow for concentration and focus, but the significance of relational interactions emerges when complex challenges require new knowledge (von Krogh et al., 2001b, p. 66). Second, I saw that such isolation drives deacons to work with professionals outside the Church. Working with other professionals may facilitate knowledge development, but the lack of cooperation within the Church hinders context-specific negotiation.

'In our working community, there are many professions, and one is often occupied with oneself,' explains Emma. David says, 'We never sit down and discuss... during a staff meeting'. Katie says, 'I work alone a lot.' The quotes are from informal interviews. I also observed that

the deacons often conduct their own trajectories, with their own goals, through the SECI modes. The absence of shared, long-term goals (Edwards, 2010, p. 53; Engeström, 2008, p. 133) makes it difficult for deacons to work as team members within the Church staff community. Based on the empirical findings of this article, Figure 4 presents the 'parallel we' SECI process as colleagues work alone but in parallel.¹²

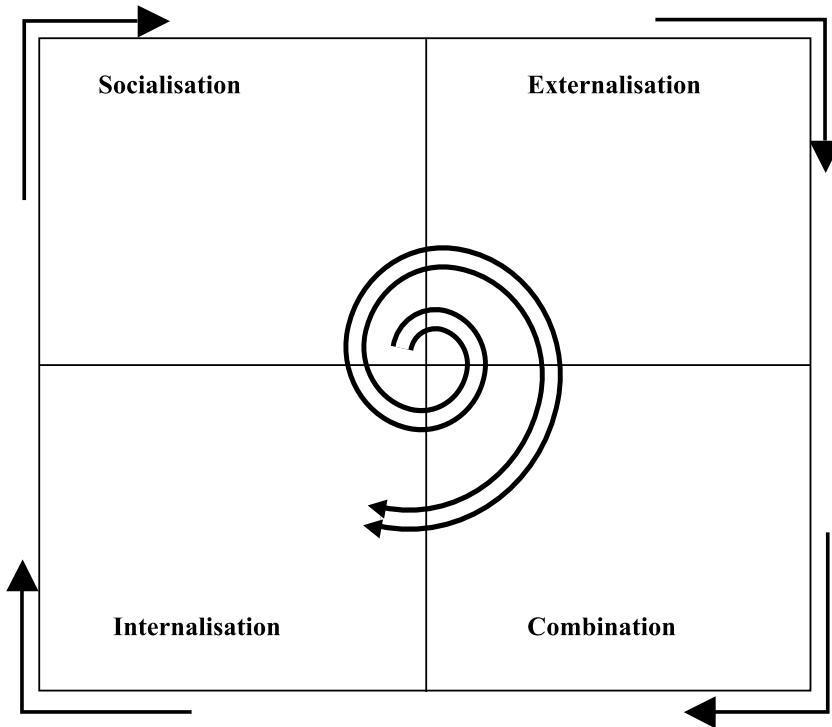


Figure 4: The parallel SECI process, where individuals work on their own tasks..

According to my observations, the parallel, isolated work emerges as the most common process. The deacons also describe these processes in the informal interviews. Sophie says, 'Now we mostly work in parallel, alongside each other ... you become isolated, with yourself and the task at hand'. Emma expresses what all five deacons say about their role within the wider Church staff: 'It is quite a lonely job, but that is the reality in Norwegian congregations.' Without a shared *ba*, the collective knowledge development is hindered.

However, during her 17 years as a deacon, Sophie has worked with some pastors who, in

contrast, encouraged cooperation. She explains: 'When an accident had occurred, for example, these pastors asked, "What do we do? How do we manage this?"' These questions invited collective discussion and reflections, along with open-ended solutions. Instead of using pre-defined guidelines, the pastors asked open questions to encourage new solutions through 'creative chaos' (Nonaka, Konno, et al., 2001,

p. 26), and the problems to be solved were anchored in the local social context (Hakkarainen et al., 2004, p. 197). Together, they created and amplified knowledge, demonstrating that collective processes of knowledge development are possible in the CofN.

In the second step, to deepen my analysis of professional knowledge development, I examine one pre-defined and one parallel process in depth, emphasising the extent of care expressed in the interactions. Both parallel as well as pre-defined SECI patterns can co-occur and interact within the same

congregation.

For the former, I analyse William's interactions within his work community in negotiating 'the routines of sandwiches'. To analyse the parallel process, I examine Katie's invitation of a woman begging in the street to come into the church.

What characterises the knowledge creation and expression of care in pre-defined processes?

In this section, I emphasise how deacons' knowledge creation can be vulnerable in pre-defined processes with a low extent of care and then

argue that theories of knowledge creation and care must include power relations.

I observed a meeting for the elderly where Deacon William was in charge. I overheard the administrative leader of the congregation, Ann, talking with two volunteers. She suggested that William could buy food for the confirmation meeting when he buys food for the next meeting for the elderly. One of the volunteers said, 'That must be a diaconal act', and they smiled. William approached them, and the leader asked if he could buy food. I heard the question as an instruction. William answered yes.

Later, in William's office, I was curious about the mentioned situation and asked about the processes of defining what he as a deacon should do. He explained about unclear expectations since he started one year ago. Even though he had ten years of experience being a deacon in another congregation, he felt that he had to just enter a system in the new congregation without using his capacity. When I asked about cooperation within his work community, he said he did not know whether he should laugh or cry, and he referred to a situation where the room they normally used to prepare sandwiches for meetings with the elderly was occupied. William suggested having the meeting in another room, serving hot dogs and ice cream, because that was easier. He tells his version of what could have been just a trifle:

We absolutely **have** to have those – those sandwiches [William refers to Ann, who argued for sandwiches]. But... it's not possible, but we still need to do it like that. We have always had sandwiches.

According to William, Ann argued that without sandwiches, few would probably turn up, and she suggested cancelling the meeting. Nevertheless, they invited the elderly and served hot dogs in the other room.

How does such a simple idea as serving hot dogs instead of sandwiches illustrate knowledge development in a Church staff community? According to William, the hot dogs represent a new idea, a response to the breaking of a routine (Nonaka, Konno, et al., 2001, p 26). Such a periodic break can be an opportunity to reconsider

existing routines and can enable knowledge creation (Nonaka, Konno, et al., 2001, pp 26–27). A breakdown of routines, even trivial, can shed light on the extent or absence of care in the interactions in a working community. According to William, enabling and maintaining relationships with the elderly were more important than following the routine of serving sandwiches. However, with little space to experiment, it is almost impossible to introduce new ideas into the SECI process (von Krogh et al., 2001b, p 74). William's previous experiences of organising meetings with the elderly in different places were likewise not acknowledged. William recounts:

'No, that's not possible,' Ann said.
'Yes,' I said, 'I have done it before, so I think it's possible'.
'No, they couldn't...' Ann responded.

In William's account of events, Ann maintains a pre-defined SECI process, basing her arguments on existing routines. William's experience was that there was little propensity in this staff community to help and that supporting inquiry was lacking. During our conversation, William was fighting back tears, and I wondered how relevant power relations are when analysing professional knowledge development.

Normally, in low-care situations, one cannot expect that other members of one's organisation will attend to one's own knowledge development and task performance (von Krogh et al., 2001a, p 38). However, William felt that he was attentively observed—but not with empathy, trust (von Krogh et al., 2001b, p 68) or with helpful questions indicating mutual personal interests and willingness to help (von Krogh et al., 2001a, p 38). The lack of helpful questions corresponds with my observations of William in interaction with colleagues in other situations.

The concept of 'routines' in this context refers to an established power position. According to William, Ann said, 'We have always had sandwiches'. Here, the phrase 'we have always' emerged as a 'routine', a conceptual tool for expressing the expertise of 'knowing how' to perform diaconal activities (Edwards, 2010). The 'routine' was expressed as expert knowledge and

a governmental rationality of work (Flyvbjerg, 2010, p 131). The fixity of a pre-defined SECI process de-legitimised William's experience, excluding him from real, shared, professional discourse.

Nevertheless, an expanded practice emerged in the internalisation mode. According to William, the overall goals were to establish inclusive communities and to not let the type of food hinder encounters (informal interview). As William stated, 'Old ladies and old men eat hot dogs and ketchup... and ice-cream – they loved it'. Hot dogs replaced sandwiches and became alternative tools for creating inclusive communities (National Council, 2009, p 5). William expanded the internalisation mode, opening the pre-defined process to some extent, but he had to do so alone, as a parallel we. However, it is important to stress that this is William's story, and I did not observe the situation. From Ann's point of view, this situation might look quite different.

The empirical findings from William's story indicate that, with little space to experiment and minimal care interactions, introducing new ideas into a pre-defined SECI can be quite difficult. Knowledge creation can be a vulnerable process in pre-defined SECI with low extent of care. The situation presented may be seen as an extreme situation, made more extreme because it arose from the trivial suggestion of serving hot dogs to the elderly. However, low care interactions in both trivial and complex tasks can subjugate and hinder knowledge creation. Moreover, the empirical findings highlight that theories of care do not sufficiently consider the misuse of power. I argue that the concept of care in knowledge creation theories may achieve more nuanced analytical approaches through expansion via theories of power.

What characterises the knowledge creation and expression of care in parallel processes?

When I was interviewing Katie, we sat in her small office, surrounded by books, pictures, papers, a Bible, a tool box, a cash box, a hammer, coffee cups, a sleeping bag, plastic flowers, big bags of clothes, a lighted candle, a Romanian-Norwegian dictionary and a sleeping dog. Katie

told a story:

It was a hopeless situation. I saw her, Elena, sitting on the bridge I pass over every day for work... I thought, if I give money to her, the money may go to an organised group. Maybe she has a lot of money in Romania, and I doubt that all the children in her photo album are hers... Maybe she fakes and is just a part of a large criminal network... And I thought that if I get involved, suddenly I will have every beggar at the door. What will the church staff and congregation say?... But then the other voice came, that says, 'You can't just pass a beggar, a poor person in the street, this is written about a lot in the Bible. The least you can do is to invite her into the community' (informal interview).

Katie invited Elena to the church in spite of unknown consequences and feared how her colleagues might react. At that time, around 2011, poor people begging in the street was a relatively new phenomenon in Norway.

Katie chose not to discuss her actions with the Church staff or decision-making committees before inviting Elena in. According to Katie, she avoided the constraints arising from the pre-defined SECI process—constraints she knew existed from her discussions of the open church, what she called the 'rules that push us down'. Instead, she intentionally conducted a parallel SECI process, where she could work alone without what she regarded as constraints from her work community. She invited Elena to have a cup of coffee in the church. Katie said:

I thought that I would take her in and simply present her as 'Elena'. I thought it was much easier that people got to meet her, rather than to begin to discuss whether we should take her in or not (informal interview).

The practical needs of life directed the deacon's actions according to the relational rationality of the care professions (Tufte, 2013, p 3).

Katie was acting on her own in unfamiliar territory, however, for which she was to some extent unqualified. Her actions challenged her cooperation with others on the Church staff. Katie worked first with volunteers and frequenters of the café and candle-lighting ceremonies in the parish centre. When the volunteers drank coffee and prayed with Elena, they

immediately began to engage with her situation, inviting her back and giving her food and other necessities. I observed that Katie had established a socialisation mode and a lot of face-to-face interactions with marginalised people unfamiliar to the congregation (Nonaka, Konno, et al., 2001, p. 20).

Further, to get around more pre-defined SECI constraints, Katie adapted her arguments to fit the 'rules' she knew from earlier discussions. She claimed to have assumed that permission from the Church staff community was not necessary to invite *one person* into the parish. Thus, she did not ask before she invited Elena in. In fact, she did not tell the other parishioners that Elena was begging in the street. Katie introduced Elena by her first name, rather than as a problem to be discussed or affected by pre-existing guidelines. Katie thought that, if she presented Elena as a representation of the problem of 'what to do with people begging on the streets', constraints on inviting her into the congregation would be imposed. Katie feared that low-care interactions, such as a lack of a 'can-do' spirit, would result in little active empathy for Elena's situation and thus reduce access to help for practical solutions to social challenges (von Krogh et al., 2001b, pp 67–72).

Instead, Katie expanded into an externalisation phase with professionals from outside the congregation. She contacted social services, the City Mission, the Salvation Army, organisations working

in Romania, the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration, other deacons with similar challenges and a European diaconal organisation working with the same needs. I observed that she created collaborative groups where members shared knowledge in the form of concepts, reflections and dialogues (Nonaka, Konno, et al., 2001, p. 16). The extent of their care, expressed as mutually enhanced access to help, active empathy, a 'can-do' spirit and little condemnation, expanded their professional knowledge (von Krogh et al., 2001b, pp. 67–73).

These collaborative groups enabled a combination mode of a SECI process external to the Church staff, emphasising communication and systematisation of knowledge, in addition to their shared externalisation mode. Group mem-

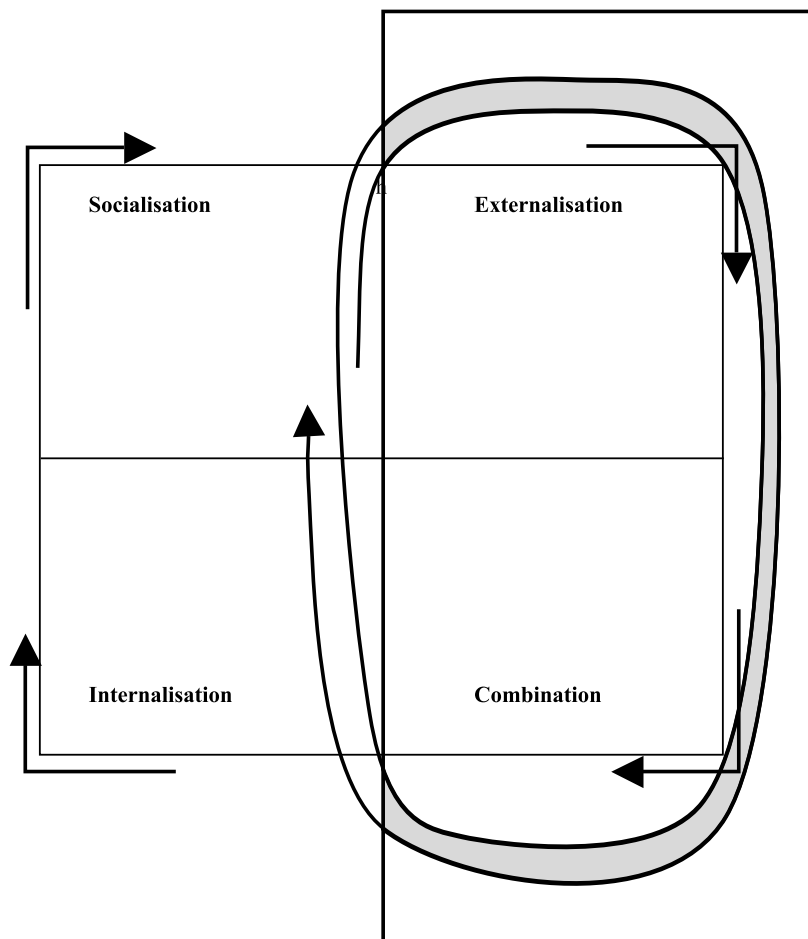


Figure 5: The boundary-crossing SECI process.

bers learned how to give practical support to poor people, systemise theoretical knowledge and establish working projects in the local congregation and community. Documents were created and shared with others seeking information. Katie held seminars that I attended, and she gave interviews in newspapers and on television. The bishop began to participate, and I heard him support the deacon Katie. They invited other famous professionals from outside the Church to seminars, which I also attended. However, Katie's *entire spiralling process* did not really include either the Church's staff community or outside professionals, since the latter groups do not normally partake in the local congregation's life. This parallel SECI is a boundary-crossing process between deacons and professionals outside the Church in the externalisation and combination mode, as Figure 5 illustrates. The grey strip indicates interactions with other professionals.

Katie has become a *boundary crosser*, developing dynamic professional knowledge with an emphasis on the 'clients' needs' (Akkerman et al., 2011; Tufte, 2013, p 3). This role may prove demanding because she must face challenges of negotiation and combine different contexts. On one hand, Katie has attained a valuable position because she can introduce elements of one practice into another. On the other hand, she faces a difficult position because she is easily perceived as peripheral to either side, risking never belonging fully to any one practice (Akkerman et al., 2011, p 134).

Within these shared modes, Katie created powerful tools from seminars and relationships with high-level Church leaders and other professionals, as well as an international communication network through media and documentation. She used the free space of the parallel SECI to enable moral power and achieve good (Kinsella, 2012, p 133). Katie's actions confronted the Church's work community with new practices in unfamiliar situations. Collaboration with Elena began a process of internalisation – the process of incorporating new knowledge into the congregation. I observed Elena working in the congregation, cleaning and preparing for the parish café and serving coffee after services

and seminars. In addition, I observed that pastors and other members had begun facilitating work for her.

In summary, Katie used the parallel SECI strategically to create a relationship with a client and to avoid the pitfalls of pre-defined SECI processes. According to von Krogh's notion of care, Katie was encouraged by and experienced some extent of care from the staff. However, she still could not enable a ba with high care interactions because of loneliness and sharing few long-term goals with colleagues. One can say that she chose isolation intentionally and hindered a possible ba in the staff, but the parallel work was chosen as a response to the 'rules that push down'. Katie established a boundary-crossing process, which created space to experiment, and she ultimately facilitated knowledge development. Finally, the material reflects the deacons' perspectives and would have been different if it had included their colleagues' reflections.

Concluding remarks

What characterises the deacons' professional knowledge creation and the expression of care within the working communities? The study's findings show five perspectives on the deacons' knowledge creation and care. First, that the five deacons' knowledge creation takes two alternative pathways from the normative and idealistic view of knowledge creation in the SECI processes: a pre-defined and a parallel SECI process, both of which can co-occur and interact within the same congregation. Both may be effective and necessary ways of working on defined tasks and routines, but they can also present significant constraints when everyday situations become too complex for the established guidelines or for one person to handle alone. When the situation becomes too complex for pre-established guidelines, the boundary crossing process emerges as a variation of the parallel SECI.

Second, according to von Krogh's conception of care, the congregations I observed displayed a tendency to low-care interactions. With the majority focusing on their own tasks, active empathy, good access to help and advice and a

collective 'can-do' spirit are constrained. However, not every deacon experienced the same extent of low care. I identified three categories of low care: 1) subjugated, 2) professionally isolated, neither hindered nor helped, and 3) encouraged, but with few shared, practical interactions. In addition to indicating the personal costs of being part of a low-care work community, the findings show that low-care interactions *reduce knowledge sharing*. More specifically, sharing knowledge in the context of both low care and the pre-defined SECI process is especially demanding, as in William's situation. A higher performance of care, as Katie experienced, facilitated more space to experiment and establish new ideas and practices. Consequently, my empirical findings support the theoretical claim that high-care relationships improve the quality of knowledge produced, while low-care relationships retard knowledge production (von Krogh et al., 2001a, p 40). Because one typically expects congregations to be external high-care providers, these internal low-care interactions are, to some extent, surprising. The Church, as a whole, appears to lose valuable contributions not only from deacons but also from *all professionals* through reducing the knowledge shared in interactions.

Third, the findings from this study indicate that deacons are creating ba with the rationality of care professions. The situations and needs of the participants in diaconal activities influence the deacons' work (Tufté, 2013, p 3). William transformed and expanded a pre-defined SECI into a parallel process in conducting the gathering for the elderly. Katie became a boundary crosser (Akkerman, 2011, p 186), seeking to develop dynamic professional knowledge by emphasising the participant's need. She created a parallel process to avoid a pre-defined SECI process, allowing her to invite Elena to church. Katie then expanded this parallel process to become a boundary crossing process that included other professionals from outside the Church. The deacons' expansions and transformations of SECI processes expanded the congregations' practices, especially in the internalisation and socialisation modes.

Fourth, deacons' knowledge development is vulnerable to asymmetrical power relationships and low-care interactions. One reason for this vulnerability is the unclear definition of their professional role, without specifically designated tasks. Without a clear negotiation of the deacon's role from the beginning, their professional knowledge easily becomes diffuse and invisible and therefore more difficult to negotiate with others (Edwards, 2010). The invisibility of knowledge and the common mind-set of taking care for granted make deacons dependent on person-to-person dialogues in their professional communities.

Fifth, the empirical findings illuminate that combining knowledge creation with care is not sufficient in analysing professional knowledge creation. I argue that theories of power will help fill a gap in theories of knowledge creation and care because 1) what looks like care can be misused to gain power; for instance, gaining a person's trust makes it easier to lead that person according to one's own interests; and 2) von Krogh's notion of low care indicates there is little interest in other persons. I believe a person can exercise power by showing much interest in each other in low-care interactions. Consequently, knowledge creation theories (Nonaka, Konno, et al., 2001; von Krogh et al., 2001b) could profit from more explicitly accounting for theories of power relationships, in addition to the effects of variations in caring behaviours. Knowledge and power are intertwined, and power relationships may both produce and restrict knowledge creation (Flyvbjerg, 2010, p 132).

To summarise, the deacons' knowledge creation and the expression of care within the working communities are characterised by two alternative pathways from the idealistic theoretical view, low-care interactions, the deacons' creation of ba with the rationality of care professions, the deacons' vulnerability to asymmetric power relations, and that theories of power will help to fill a gap in theories of knowledge creation and care. Few interactions of shared knowledge challenge the working communities' collective knowledge development.

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Notes

- In this article, I use the concepts of knowledge creation and knowledge development interchangeably. When referring to the SECI model, Nonaka et al. use the concept of knowledge creation (Nonaka, Konno, et al., 2001), while the concept of knowledge development is used more frequently in relation to care (von Krogh et al., 2001a). However, when Nonaka and Georg von Krogh write together about knowledge creation and care, they use knowledge development at some points (von Krogh et al., 2001a) and knowledge creation at others (von Krogh et al., 2012). In this article, I use the concepts of knowledge creation and knowledge development interchangeably.
- To be a deacon in the CofN requires a master's degree in

diakonia (since 2005). The degree includes the study of theology, pastoral care, ethics, leadership, research and practical fieldwork, and normally requires a bachelor's in health care, social work or pedagogy as a pre-requisite.

- 3 The word 'power' is used (von Krogh et al., 2001a, pp 39,41,45) but not in relation to an extensive use of the theories of power.
- 4 I also searched with the terms 'development' and 'SECI' instead of 'creation' (see 'Theory of knowledge creation-the SECI process, 'ba' and care).
- 5 I make pragmatic use of Nonaka's understanding of organisations in order to analyse knowledge creation in congregations as a workplace and the potential knowledge creation entity.
- 6 I do not discuss what religious communities are in relation to professional communities. My main focus is professionals within religious communities.
- 7 Instead of using the notions of tacit and explicit know-

ledge, I rely on Yrjö Engeström's (Engeström, 2008, pp. 128–129) concept of tool-mediated knowledge. I do not explicitly use the concept of tool-mediated knowledge in this article, but I elaborate on my understanding of it in the SECI model in the article 'Deacons' professional practice as knowledge creation' (Nygaard et al., 2013).

- 8 <http://letra.mf.no/>. Read 29.1.15
- 9 Two of the deacons had master's degrees.
- 10 By participants in this article, I refer to people participating in various activities, who are neither professionals nor volunteers.
- 11 I call the pre-defined process a SECI process, because it empirically illustrates how the deacons negotiate the routines and guidelines in their professional knowledge creation.
- 12 I call the parallel process a SECI process, because it illustrates how individuals empirically, not idealistically, interact when they work in the same organisations.

Abstract

How does the expression of care between colleagues influence knowledge development in working communities? This paper presents the results of an ethnographic field study of five deacons in five Church of Norway congregations, focusing on their professional knowledge development with colleagues in the congregational context. The analysis applies theories concerning the relation between knowledge creation and care to highlight how the presence or absence of care can influence knowledge development. Knowledge development refers to formation of new knowledge rather than adaptation of existing knowledge. Findings indicate two main constraints regarding deacons' knowledge development in their working communities. First, interactions between staff members in the congregations I studied indicate a tendency of low-care exchanges. Second, deacons' knowledge creation is characterised by pre-defined and parallel work processes within their work environment which isolate the individuals from one another. The results show connections between the knowledge created and the extent of care expressed, as well as how relational power influences the knowledge created. I argue that theories of knowledge creation and care must consider to a greater extent the significance of a community's power relations in the knowledge development process.

Abstract in Norwegian (Sammendrag)

Hvordan påvirker omsorg blant kollegaer kunnskapsutvikling i et arbeidsfellesskap? Denne artikkelen presenter resultater fra en etnografisk feltstudie av fem diakoner i fem ulike menigheter i Den norske Kirke. Fokuset er på diakoners kunnskapsutvikling med kollegaer i menighetsstaben. I analysen brukes teorier som belyser sammenhengen mellom kunnskapsutvikling og omsorg. Kunnskapsutvikling handler om å utarbeide ny kunnskap fremfor å tilpasse seg den eksisterende. Funnene indikerer to hovedhindringer i forhold til diakonenes kunnskapsutvikling. For det første, interaksjonene mellom kollegaer i stabsfellesskapet indikerer en tendens til liten grad av omsorg. For det andre er den potensielle kunnskapsutviklingen preget av rutiner og parallelle arbeidsprosesser hvor hver enkelt ofte jobber alene. Funnene indikerer en sammenheng mellom grad av omsorg i arbeidsfellesskapet og hva slags kunnskap som blir utviklet. I tillegg viser materialet at relasjonell makt påvirker hva slags kunnskap som bli utviklet. Derfor argumenter jeg for at teorier om kunnskapsutvikling og omsorg vil tjene på å inkludere maktperspektiver.